

The Product Launch

Andy Boon



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by Andy Boon

Book 9

Pocket Reader Series

SAMPLE

Halico
CREATIVE EDUCATION

Pocket Readers Overview

The 10-book business reader series tells the story of your first year working in the product marketing department of *ABC Convenience Stores*. The series looks at skills and strategies for being successful in interviews, the first week on the job, giving presentations, taking part in meetings, writing emails, entertaining business clients, going overseas on business, dealing with office conflict, launching new products, and mentoring new staff.

The Product Launch

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SAMPLE

1. The Beginning

The story begins with you. In April, you started work in the product marketing department of *ABC Convenience Stores*. You had a good first week on the job (*See Book 2*). You did a successful business presentation (*See Book 3*). You chaired a successful business meeting (*See Book 4*). You attended a training workshop. You learned how to write better business emails (*See Book 5*). You looked after and entertained two important overseas speakers from the U.S. (*See Book 6*). You went on your first business trip overseas, attended an important conference, and met Mary Benson from the *ABC U.K.* team (*See Book 7*). There was also a

big office conflict with Mr. Ogawa and Mr. Ogawa was fired (*See Book 8*).

It is now November 1st. You have been working for *ABC Convenience Stores* for seven months. It is Monday morning. Ms. Tanaka calls you over to her desk.

“Thanks for your presentation to Sally Harrison and John Turnbull of *Underground Sandwiches* last week,” she says. “It was really successful. They want to go ahead with the new partnership deal. They’ve agreed to sell *Underground Sandwiches’* hot soup in our stores.”

“That’s great!” you reply.

“We’d like to launch the soup in our stores for the new year – in early January,” Ms. Tanaka says. “I know you’re very busy dealing with the first partnership deal with *Underground Sandwiches*. The sales of their sandwiches in our stores is going really well, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” you reply. “We achieved all of our sales target for the third quarter. We’re going to continue selling the sandwiches next year. They’re really popular with our customers.”

“Well, I’d like you to be in charge of the **product launch** for the soup,” Ms. Tanaka requests. “Mr. Ogawa was responsible for this area, but

he's gone now. Until we hire somebody new, I need you to help out."

"Sure," you reply. "I can do it."

"Okay," Ms. Tanaka says. She smiles. "And...."

"And?" you reply.

"Please don't make the same mistakes that we did a few years ago." Ms. Tanaka looks very serious. "We lost a lot of money on the last launch for soup."

"What mistakes?" you ask.

"You should speak to Mr. Oga... I keep forgetting. He's no longer with

us. I mean speak to Ms. Igarashi,” Ms. Tanaka replies. “She’ll tell you what happened. She’ll give you some good advice about what NOT to do.”

“Okay, thanks. I’ll talk to her,” you reply.

“Then, make a plan and share it with me tomorrow,” Ms. Tanaka says.

“Tomorrow? Okay,” you agree.

2. The Failed Product Launch

“Ms. Igarashi, do you have some time?” you ask. “I need to speak to you about the product launch we did a few years ago at ABC. It was a launch for soup and it **failed**.”

“Ah! You mean the soup **Pods**?” Ms. Igarashi replies. “I remember it well.”

“Pods?” you ask.

“Yes,” Ms. Igarashi says. “Let me talk to you about it later. I’m a bit busy now. I’ll book the meeting room for after lunch. I’ll have time to talk to you then. Should we say 2:00 p.m.?”

“That’s great,” you say. “Thanks.”

2.1 The Product

You enter the meeting room with Ms. Igarashi at 2:00 p.m. You bring your notebook, so you can take lots of notes.

“So, tell me about the failed product launch,” you say to Ms. Igarashi.

“It was a few years ago and we did a deal with *Cook’s Soup*,” Ms. Igarashi begins her story. “They had this new, exciting product – ‘soup pods.’”

“Soup pods?” you ask.

“Yeah, ‘soup pods,’” Ms. Igarashi says. “You know, like coffee pods? There’s one serving of soup in a plastic pod.

You put the pod in a special machine. You add water to the machine. You press ‘start’ on the machine. It makes a cup of hot soup.”

“Okay,” you say, “I got it. I’ve seen the coffee pod machines on TV.”

“Well, we launched the soup pods in all of our ABC stores in the month of December,” Ms. Igarashi explains. “We wanted to offer our customers an interesting snack item for winter. Our **key message** was: “A hot snack that stops you feeling hungry between meals.” We wanted to **position** the soup as a light, low-calorie snack. We wanted to target customers who feel hungry between breakfast and lunch, lunch

and dinner, or after dinner. They could go to a local ABC store, buy the soup, eat it, and not worry about getting fat. The soup was a healthy snack option. We had a special soup pod machine in each store. Customers buy a pod, use the machine, and then take the soup away in a special cup.”

“So, what went wrong?” you ask.

“Well, there were many things wrong with the product itself,” Ms. Igarashi says. “We did a **consumer survey** with 10,000 customers. We found out lots of useful information about what went wrong. The first thing was that we only sold two flavors of soup – chicken noodle and vegetable noodle. So, customers

soon got bored of this. They wanted different flavors. They quickly stopped buying the soup pods. They bought canned soup from their local supermarket instead. In the consumer survey, customers said that the supermarket had a better choice of soup.”

“I see,” you reply. “Two choices of soup weren’t enough.”

“No, we needed more flavors” Ms. Igarashi agrees. “The second problem was the serving of soup in each pod. It was just too small. We positioned the soup as a light snack between meals. However, customers actually bought the soup for their main lunch. It just wasn’t

big enough. So, they got hungry. In the consumer survey, customers complained about this. It was a reason they quickly stopped buying the pods.”

“So, the customers misunderstood the positioning of the product?” you ask.

“Yes, right,” Ms. Igarashi says. “The third problem was the calories. The soup pods were positioned as a low-calorie snack as I said. However, they were actually quite high in calories. The vegetable noodle soup was about 130 calories. The chicken noodle soup was 195 calories. This was much higher than canned soup. So, some customers in the survey

4. Language focus and Tasks

4.1 Vocabulary #1

Read the following sentences. What do you think the words in **bold** mean?

1. I would like you to be in charge of the **product launch** for the *Underground Sandwiches*' soup.

2. A few years ago, our launch **failed**, and so we stopped selling the product.

4.2 Vocabulary #2

Read the definitions to the words in Task 4.1. Did you guess the meanings of the words correctly?

Product launch:	(Noun phrase) This is when a company starts selling something new. To launch a product is the action (verb) of starting to sell something new.
Failed:	(adjective) To describe something that is unsuccessful. A failed launch means few customers bought the new product. To fail is the action (verb) of being unsuccessful.
Pod	(Noun) A small round container that may contain food or drink. For example, people use coffee pods. They put the pod into a special machine. It makes a cup of coffee for them.
Key messages:	(Noun phrase) The main points about the product that a company wants its customers or target to know and remember.

4.4 Reflection Questions

1. Why was the product launch for soup pods unsuccessful?

2. Why do you think the product launch for *Underground Sandwiches*' soup was successful?

3. Talk to a friend. What other things could happen to make a product launch unsuccessful?

4. Talk to a friend. What other things could you do to make a product launch successful?

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著者： アンディ・ブーン

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発行所：HALICO株式会社

〒103-0027 東京都中央区日本橋3-4-15

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